Human Tail!

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Figure 1. Photograph of two-year old boy with a tail arising from the sacrococcygeal area.

This two-year old boy was brought to our outpatient clinic by parents with a tail like structure arising from the sacrococcygeal area since birth. There was no history developmental delay and on examination the child was neurologically normal. Local examination revealed a firm tail-like structure **(Figure 1)** arising from the coccyx. The parents were offered surgical removal of the appendage. However, they denied the operation and elected to take the child home without any surgery.

Human tails are unusual malformations and are divided into true tails and pseudo tails (lipoma, teratoma, myelomeningocele and parasitic fetus). True human tail is a rare event. It is defined as a caudal, vestigial, midline protrusion with skin covering a combination of muscle and adipose tissue.Though this anomaly occurs in all races and both sexes, there is a slight male predominance.[1] Familial cases have been reported.[2]

Fetal tail is a normal feature during embryonic development (during the 5th-6th week, the human embryo has a tail with 10 to 12 vertebrae) that regresses by fusion so that on a remnant is left as coccyx.[3] The persistent tail probably arises from the most distal non-vertebrate remnant of the embryonic tail.

Simple surgical excision of true tail has been advocated as a definitive treatment.[2] However, patients should be carefully evaluated to detect associated midline anomalies or other congenital malformations, that might change the surgical approach in these patients.[4] It is important to make distinction between true and pseudo tail in the lumbosacral region since the treatment and prognosis are different.

References

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